

June 14, 2011

Legislative leaders,

We once again find ourselves at a crossroads. Today, you begin the final debate on one of the most divisive state budgets in history, which strips away generations of workers' rights. While the outcome is likely a foregone conclusion, you have one final opportunity to bring people together by accepting the offered wage and benefit concessions, while preserving long-standing bargaining rights.

The present rancor and divisiveness is not how we do things in Wisconsin. Accepting the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate in 1858, Abraham Lincoln declared, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Lincoln lost that pivotal election to Stephen Douglas, but he went on to win the presidency and preserve the union, becoming one of our greatest leaders. Like Lincoln, you also have a historic opportunity to unite a divided people.

This budget will effectively end generations of hard-fought labor rights, stirring the passions of a now deeply divided state. This is not the Wisconsin way. State and local employees already have agreed to historic health and pension concessions. Going farther by stripping away the fundamental rights of workers to organize and bargain does nothing to balance the state's budget.

As our elected leaders, you have the power to change this budget. These far-reaching measures on workers' rights are being taken by choice, not necessity. This budget has left working families across Wisconsin demoralized and under attack—and it falls upon your shoulders to stop it.

Much has changed over the last few months. In the midst of protests and political battles, revenue growth has increased over \$600 million, hardworking employees have made unprecedented benefit concessions, and the Legislative Fiscal Bureau has projected an over \$300 million surplus for the next budget. All of this begs the question: why are we engaged in such drastic action?

Taking away fundamental rights from working people has left a deeply polarized electorate locked in an endless cycle of recall elections and recriminations. However, you have the power to balance the budget without radical measures—if you have the courage to act.

Lincoln's vision of unity, political savvy and oratorical skill helped to heal a deeply divided nation. As we confront the turmoil that now grips our state, we all must call upon the better angels of our nature to find common solutions to the challenges before us. The table has been set for a compromise that implements concessions, while preserving long-standing rights. I urge you to take this last opportunity to move us forward without abandoning fairness or a sense of decency.

Sincerely,



Tony Evers, PhD  
State Superintendent

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